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Chair

Mrs. Karen Vecchio

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● (1625)

[English]

The Chair (Mrs. Karen Vecchio (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to the 110th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

First of all I would like to apologize to the panellists. We did have votes, so we were delayed.

Before I go through formal introductions, I'm going to pass the floor immediately over to Roxanne Fairweather since she has to leave very shortly. I'm going to open it for Roxanne to do her opening remarks, and then we'll be able to ask Norma the questions that have to go with those remarks.

Roxanne, please go ahead.

Ms. Roxanne Fairweather (Co-Chair, Women for 50%): Thank you very much for inviting us to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

Good afternoon. My name is Roxanne Fairweather. I am CEO of a company called Innovatia in New Brunswick, and I'm also co-chair of Women for 50%, along with Aldéa Landry. I am accompanied by our heavy lifter here—she does all the heavy lifting—Norma Dubé, our executive director. We're going to be doing the presentation in English, but we can accept questions in either official language.

We launched Women for 50% 18 months ago, in January of 2017. We are a group of 12 very passionate women from different areas of the province, with great representation right across the province and with different backgrounds, including business, academia, politics, and public service.

At the core, we were all very dismayed with New Brunswick being the laggard across the 10 provinces, having only 16% representation of females in the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly. This is unacceptable. It has to change, and we need to have our voices heard and have equality on the legislative floor.

Our overarching goal was to achieve 50% female candidates in the 2018 election, which is coming up in September. In order to change that 16% representation, we first have to have women on the ballots.

There were three strategies that we deployed. One was to create awareness, because I have to say sadly that I wasn't aware, back four years ago when I sat and watched the legislature begin, that we had such a dismal representation issue. We really started by trying to create awareness of this need for more women to be elected and to support those women by nurturing a public dialogue and creating public awareness and by explaining the immense impact that women have and can have when they hold office and the impact of not having women's voices heard, and by publicly tracking the progress towards the 50% goal and holding our political parties accountable for achieving that result.

Second, we encourage women to run—and we have talked to hundreds of women across the province—by demystifying what's involved in running for public office. We lend tangible support to interested women across the province who need information and education. Norma will get into that a little bit later on. We work very closely with political parties, and in collaboration with them we have created tools and resources that we make available to all through our website.

We do build and we have built a sustainable infrastructure—we continue to do that—by enlisting the support of party leaders and those in the party and inviting them to publicly share their support, their plans, their targets, and their progress and by holding them accountable.

We also provide input to the New Brunswick electoral reform process and work with well-established resource partners who can conduct outreach and be a continuing source of education and support and mentoring for women who are considering the opportunity to be candidates in this election.

We believe that in our short span, 18 months, we have made significant inroads, but there is a ton of work to do. This is a mammoth job. It's 200 years of an endemic issue that we have, and social change really has to occur to make any significant change.

Now with just over three months left before the provincial election, we need to continue to encourage and nurture public awareness around the need to have more women run in politics. Again, we are talking to hundreds of women every day.

This is about gender-balanced politics. It's about ensuring that our political representatives better reflect the people they represent, 50% of us. It's about the female voice being heard and respected.

Repeated intense research by many sources proves that better outcomes result from gender-balanced decision-making, with faster decisions, more effective actions taken, and better financial outcomes. Women bring a unique perspective to all tables, a perspective that must be reflected in policy-making at the top of our legislative system.

I'll now turn it over to Norma to speak to some of the challenges we heard about from the hundreds of women we talked to. She will tell you what we're doing about some of those issues and what we're doing about breaking down some of the barriers.

Ms. Norma Dubé (Director, Women for 50%): *Merci*, Roxanne. You might want to leave if you want to catch that flight.

Ms. Roxanne Fairweather: Yes.

Thank you very much. I appreciate your time.

Ms. Norma Dubé: Roxanne will miss the fun part when your questions begin in a few minutes.

We've been looking forward to this since we got the invitation to appear before the standing committee. Actually, Roxanne came back two days early from a business trip to India in order to be here today, so she'll be here in spirit in terms of continuing.

None of the points I'll be raising today should be of any surprise to members of the standing committee. I am convinced that they've been raised again and again and again, but we need to raise them again so that they can be heard and actions taken. When we started hearing it from the women themselves, it made it very real for us. It gave us a sense of urgency, a little bit like Roxanne sitting in the gallery of the legislature and asking the question, "Well, where are the women?" There is a sense of urgency in advocating for change and advocating for solutions.

We've had so few role models in New Brunswick in terms of elected women in office. We've had 37 elected; 32 are still living, and we've lost five. I had the pleasure of working with all 37 elected women. I was in the public service for 38 years, and I knew all of them—all very strong women, but not enough of them to provide role models for women and girls.

Many women have never imagined themselves in this kind of public political role, and thus have to be approached and approached again, and sometimes a third time—and a fourth time, and a fifth time—before they actually make that decision to throw their hat into the ring. We generally do not like to work in a confrontational environment, and politics can sometimes have that flavour. It's a system that we've given ourselves over time, and it's not one that women always enjoy. We prefer to work in a collaborative kind of environment. We prefer building together as opposed to opposing for the sake of opposing. There again, there's a little bit of a culture issue that's not necessarily attractive to women in terms of entering that field.

We don't appreciate the media's portrayal of women in politics. They do seem to be more interested in our appearance and our demeanour, as opposed to our positions or accomplishments or opinions. We don't have the same types of networks. Caregiving is a significant challenge.

We would also guess that part of the challenge in New Brunswick and everywhere else, we suspect, is that our local riding associations are very male-dominated. Naturally we tend to surround ourselves with people who look like us. It is a barrier for women entering at that particular level.

I am skipping several pages here because we were told to hurry up.

We feel that in the 14 months since we were born, we've made a difference. The corner of my kitchen table is exactly where we're doing Women for 50%, like most women's organizations do, and we are making a difference. We are seeing and sensing and hearing a different conversation in our province. We are working very, very closely with the political parties. We've built tools with them, all of them, at the same table at the same time. There are many examples of good things in New Brunswick.

I will wait for your questions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (1630)

The Chair: You're amazing. Thank you so much. I am sorry about having to rush you.

We do have some other groups here. I'll do the formal introductions now.

Norma Dubé is from Women for 50%. From the PEI Coalition for Women in Government, we have Dawn Wilson, executive director. From Réseau femmes et politique municipale de la Capitale-Nationale, we have Sylvie Asselin and Marjolaine Gilbert. We have Natalie Pon here as an individual. From the Conseil du statut de la femme, we have Louise Cordeau, president, by video conference from Quebec City.

Although we usually allow seven minutes for opening remarks, we are in a time crunch today, so if we could reduce that to five minutes, it would be greatly appreciated.

If you don't mind, then, we'll start with Dawn Wilson for five minutes. Thanks.

Ms. Dawn Wilson (Executive Director, PEI Coalition for Women in Government): It is an honour to be here today with all of you. On behalf of the Coalition for Women in Government, thank you for the invitation.

For those of you who may not be aware, the PEI Coalition for Women in Government is a multipartisan coalition of individuals and organizations that came together in 2003 to identify strategies for increasing women's election to all levels of government in P.E.I.

As you know through your consultations in this committee, the under-representation of women in government persists in jurisdictions across the country, including Prince Edward Island, and despite more women than ever before being elected to the House of Commons in 2015, that number rose only slightly, to 26%. The numbers are even more concerning in Prince Edward Island, where women are only 18% of currently elected MLAs, just slightly better than New Brunswick. In comparison, we're among the lowest in the country in regard to gender in elected office, and well below the 30% critical mass identified by the United Nations as needed to make meaningful change.

Much of our work focuses on identifying and addressing barriers to women's participation; however, I think it's important for us to focus on why we do that work and the benefits that women and diverse perspectives bring. I won't touch too much on that, because Norma did such a great job of outlining some of those benefits.

Through our work on the Engaging Island Women for Political Action project, we aim to work directly with individual women, as well as to address structural and systemic change. Through the project we asked participants how parties benefit specifically from more gender diversity. The top three responses included increased perspective at decision-making tables, more role models and mentors for women, and better reflection of the diversity of the island population. I think those responses support the research out there, which was outlined earlier.

However, the coalition's work over the past 15 years reveals that women face barriers and challenges to political leadership because of their gender. There are individual barriers, maybe, like lack of confidence, but more often they are structural and systemic barriers.

Through this project, the coalition undertook a needs assessment process to determine barriers to women's participation, and participants identified a number of them, which I will discuss.

One was sexism or an old boys' club mentality within society generally, but maybe also within political parties, resulting in some women feeling unwelcome in participating in politics.

Another was home and family commitments, which Norma touched on earlier. Although gender roles are changing in society, with more men taking on caregiving responsibilities, we still hear from women that they continue to perform more of the unpaid caregiving for children, vulnerable adults, and elders in the home.

Financial inequality or lack of resources was cited. Women in Canada continue to earn less money than men over the course of their lives. This gap is even wider for women from diverse backgrounds, such as indigenous women or women with disabilities. As a consequence, women have less access to financial resources to run for office in the first place.

Online harassment and violence against women in politics is increasing, and it negatively impacts women in deciding to run for office.

One of the biggest barriers we've identified over the years for women in Prince Edward Island in particular lies with getting women's names on the ballot in the first place. We heard earlier that to have women elected, we need their names on those ballots. This is not unique to P.E.I. In the 2013 book *Stalled: The Representation of Women in Canadian Governments*, jurisdictions across the country identified this as a barrier as well.

History and examples show that the number of women in government will not rise naturally on its own; at the current pace of change, it would take Prince Edward Island 105 years to reach gender balance in the legislative assembly.

We feel a concerted and sustained effort is needed to increase the number of women elected, and it must include a combination of approaches to address individual barriers as well as structural and systemic ones.

I know you've received excellent recommendations from individuals and organizations during your consultation period. I'd like to take a moment to echo the recommendations you've heard from some of those folks, including Equal Voice, who work more closely at the federal level than we do. We very much work at the provincial level.

● (1635)

I will share some recommendations that we sometimes make provincially that might be helpful: increased funding for women's organizations that seek to advance gender and diversity in leadership through skills building or structural and systemic change; adherence to fixed election dates; financial incentives for political parties to run more women candidates; ensuring open and transparent nomination processes for parties; implementation of policies that support increased gender and diversity; support for caregiving, with access to affordable and accessible child care; and implementation of sexual harassment policies and codes of conduct for elected officials.

One thing we focused on most recently in Prince Edward Island is restructuring the hours of the legislature to accommodate members with caregiving responsibilities

In closing, we all have a role to play in terms of increasing the number in elected office, whether it's individuals, legislatures, community organizations, parties, or political institutions.

I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide some input into your process. We recognize it's not easy, but legislation, plans, and policies that not only ensure the equal involvement of women but encourage it are vital to creating an equitable future for all of us.

I look forward to your recommendations.

● (1640)

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much.

We're now going to turn it over to Réseau femmes et politique municipale de la Capitale-Nationale; I'm practising my French, since Joël is here.

We'll turn it over to Sylvie.

Go ahead, Sylvie. You have five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Asselin (President, Réseau femmes et politique municipale de la Capitale-Nationale): Madam Chair and members of the committee, I would like to thank you for allowing me to speak today about some aspects of the realities that women face in municipal politics.

Politics at the municipal level are one of proximity, and often serve as an incubator or a springboard for moving to other levels of provincial and federal politics.

We are going to talk about what we have experienced in plenary committees and municipal councils, but you often face the same situations at your caucuses and parliamentary committees.

For the purpose of this exercise, we noted two important aspects where intervention, education, mobilization and tools are necessary.

The first aspect is recruitment. We have to make sure that there are several female candidates at the next elections, and we are working hard for this to be the case. The second aspect is retention. We have to determine what obstacles women currently face in municipal politics and which make them not want to run again.

To adequately meet the needs of this committee, we focus on recruitment and retention.

The mission of the Réseau femmes et politique municipale de la Capitale-Nationale is to encourage women who are interested in politics to make the jump into municipal politics and to remain there, either by encouraging networking or offering other tools.

Our network covers 58 municipalities, 6 of which are regional county municipalities (RCMs). There is the RCM for Charlevoix-Est, the RCM for Charlevoix, which you now know, the RCM for Île d'Orléans, the RCM for Côte-de-Beaupré, the RCM for Jacques-Cartier and the RCM for Portneuf. In addition to these RCMs, there's also Wendake. There is also the greater Quebec region, which covers the cities of Quebec, Ancienne-Lorette and Saint-Augustin-de-Desmaures.

Our network has been in place since 2011. We are a non-profit, non-partisan organization. We provide support through our coordinator, and our board is made up of company directors, business leaders, local councillors and former councillors, etc.

Since I have little speaking time, I'll try to move ahead quickly.

We have to speak to a certain number of women to find out how to influence the culture and the operation of their organizations and agencies, and also how to contribute to performance improvement. The University of Western Ontario conducted a study in 2006 stating that gender diversity on boards can bring various points of view, raise more discussions and allow for better decisions to be made.

For municipal politics to be able to benefit from the unique contribution of women, for every seven elected representatives, three would have to be women, which represents 43%. Right now, in Quebec city, 31% of elected representatives are women. Therefore we are far from having a more inclusive culture for women.

When a survey was conducted right before the last municipal elections, mayors told us that they had a hard time recruiting women. This is the case for all political parties, and specifically for women under 35 years of age.

Our network examined this issue, and I will allow Ms. Gilbert to tell you more about this topic.

Ms. Marjolaine Gilbert (Coordinator, Réseau femmes et politique municipale de la Capitale-Nationale): What can we do to attract more female candidates? We believe that young women should be encouraged while still in school by including presentations, testimonies, mentorship possibilities and even tours of town councils in CEGEP and university courses. In order to accomplish this, through their experience and their passion, young elected women need to show that it is accessible and that there is support from women from within.

We need to organize female student gatherings in town councils, internships for female students. We also need to offer them attendance incentives. We must demystify the role of a woman that has been elected, and work long in advance. We must implement a plan that will foster a work-life balance by taking the following measures: change the preparatory meeting times from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., including dinner, daycare, and homework help; provide for a distance operating mode on computer gateway during work sessions; review the wages of municipal representatives, which range, in the smallest municipalities, between $8,000 and $18,000.

Within community organizations, we need to diversify our work by creating networks of business women and of indigenous women. Women have proved that they can contribute to these organizations, where often they hold management positions. We need to invite them to build the future by being heard in the public sphere and by getting involved in politics.

Having been unable to find official data on the retention of municipal representatives, in 2015 the network conducted a study on their perseverance in municipal politics. The network asked itself the following question: why encourage female candidates?

Our findings led to the nine following points associated with the organizational environment that would encourage them to persevere: find meaning, confidence, independence, co-operation, support and mutual help, recognition, respect, transparency and work conditions.

How do we face the issues of retention? We must implement an integration mechanism for newly elected men and women, offering them mentorship and networking activities. Our network believes that a permanent tool needs to be designed for municipal representatives so that they can assess the climate of plenary sessions or of municipal council sessions.

Thank you very much for your attention.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

I'm sorry for rushing you all; you have so much to add.

We're now going to move to Natalie Pon for five minutes.

Ms. Natalie Pon (As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you all for having me here today.

It's an honour to come before you today and speak on this topic. As a woman and also a volunteer in politics who hasn't actually held a paid role in this environment, I'm looking forward to developing how we can improve the representation of women in politics as we move forward here.

As a volunteer who's been involved in nomination campaigns, leadership campaigns, and general election campaigns, I don't want to be here reciting statistics and studies. I want to tell the stories of women and what they're experiencing on the ground when they're campaigning, and most importantly, I don't want my comments here to be interpreted today as partisan. Although I do come from one particular partisan background, I think these experiences can be appreciated and understood across all political parties.

In my opinion, we are failing women in the candidate recruitment and nomination process, and this is largely due to the inherent biases that we as a society still hold today. I have door-knocked and campaigned for both men and women over the past 10 years, and in my experience and the experiences of the women I've spoken to over the last little while, women receive prying questions that men do not seem to get at the door, questions like, "Are you married?", "What does your husband think about you doing this?", and "How are you going to take care of your children if you're an elected official?"

I recently ran for the board of directors of my own provincial political party and I received similar prying questions at party AGMs and party board meetings. Men who were also running for those positions didn't seem to get questions about their marital status or whether they had children or how old they were.

While these questions may appear innocent and while men do sometimes receive these questions, I was receiving them when male colleagues were not. Female candidates often receive these questions when male candidates do not, and I found that when I was attending events with male colleagues or friends, or when women go door-knocking with men, they don't receive these questions as often. These women have also told me on the nomination campaigns and general election campaigns that they receive a better response at the doors when they're with a man. They can focus on policy, they can focus on politics, and they don't have to answer questions about the personal life choices they have made to get to the point of running for office.

These are women in their thirties. They have young children oftentimes. They're bright, brilliant, smart women who would represent their ridings well, but when they get these questions, they start to doubt their ability to do their jobs because of their personal situations. It's almost as if they're asked why they never thought about this in the first place or why they haven't asked these questions.

The bias I see here is that society still thinks that a woman's main role in society or in the family unit is as the caregiver. We default to assuming that the man is the politician and maybe the woman is not, a lot of the time. Society is still very surprised to see women in politics and has no problem verbalizing that surprise. This is why we need to be speaking out about this issue. We need society to start recognizing that it's normal to see women in politics, and that we should expect to see more women in politics as well.

A friend recently told me she didn't realize how much attention would be directed at her ability to be a mother when she was campaigning, and she felt a lot of guilt about that and about her family's decision that she run for office. I think what's even more surprising is that when I'm door-knocking, I often hear women at the door say, "My husband isn't at home, and he usually makes the political decisions in our family."

When we hear these things, we're constantly being reminded that politics has historically been a man's game and it's a surprise for women to be making those decisions or for women to be at the door campaigning. Politics is a daunting exercise. I don't need to explain that to anyone here, but these kinds of questions can seriously cause someone—anyone, but particularly women—to seriously doubt their ability to do the job, because society is questioning it.

In my experience, women have had to work harder to earn that respect that men seem to get naturally, and I think there are a number of things we can do about this. A lot of these biases are generational. If women can continue to look past these comments and put their names forward, we will see more women in politics. They will win elections, and it will be common to see women in politics as well.

I got involved because when I was growing up my MP was a woman and a minister, and I looked up to her. Looking back, I have no doubt that she received a lot of scrutiny that her male colleagues did not and had to work a lot harder than the men to be taken seriously, but I didn't realize that until I started getting involved myself.

On the other hand, I don't want to hold up the female politician as the poster child for success or what could happen for other women. We all come from different stories and different perspectives, and I think to say that one woman is the homogeneous example or the role model that we can all strive to emulate does a disservice to the cause as well. We can't assume that everyone is going to come in with the same experiences or will have the same experiences in politics.

● (1650)

When I speak to women about this issue, they're often surprised to hear that other women going through the nomination process have experienced the same thing. This goes back to what I was speaking on earlier, about how we're not talking about these issues. So many women experience these barriers or these judgments at doors, but they don't talk to other women about it, so it's not known that it's as common as we may think it is. We need to be able to talk about these issues without being told that we're complaining, that we're not tough enough, or that we need to suck it up. I think these are real issues that we need to be talking about without judgment.

We also need to be calling out people when we experience these biases. I've been so lucky to have the support of both men and women through the political process who are really good at steering that conversation away from personal matters and towards the politics itself. If you are asking someone a question, I think we all need to be asking ourselves if we would ask that question to a man.

To support women, I think we really need to be supporting them: donating to them, knocking on doors for them, and selling memberships for them, and not just saying, "I support you", but really putting actions in place of words if we want to help women achieve success.

We don't really need to talk about why diversity is a good thing; we all know why it is such a good thing—

The Chair: Natalie?

Ms. Natalie Pon: I'll try to wrap it up here.

The Chair: Yes.

Ms. Natalie Pon: I think one thing that we look to as a solution is gender quotas or quotas for representation. While I think they're well intentioned, I look at them in the same way as we all seem to approach nepotism, which is that you create doubt on why someone is there in the first place, and I really don't want to open up women to that doubt in the first place.

The Chair: Absolutely. Natalie, thank you very much.

If you have your statements, please send them to us so that we can make sure we share them with all of the members of the committee. If there are tidbits we've missed, we'll be able to make sure we read those and have those in our briefs.

Now we're going to hear from Louise Cordeau, president of the *Conseil du statut de la femme*.

Go ahead, Louise. You have anywhere between five and six minutes today.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Cordeau (President, Conseil du statut de la femme): Hello to you all.

I am very pleased to be with you today. We would like to thank you for the invitation and we are extremely pleased to contribute to the reflection on barriers that women face in politics.

As you know, the Conseil du statut de la femme is a government organization that does consultation and carries out studies. Its mission is to advise the minister and the Government of Quebec as well as to inform Quebeckers on everything associated with gender equality. In November 2017, we were invited to take part in an initiative launched by the Commission des relations with Quebeckers. We submitted a brief on the place of women in politics. This brief reiterated the recommendations that our council published in 2015 in a paper entitled "Les femmes en politique: en route vers la parité" [Women in politics: headed towards equality]. If I may, I will go over the major points of this paper and of this document.

In this paper, the council studied the measures that have been adopted in Quebec and elsewhere around the world to increase the presence of women in politics. It also questioned 18 women that were candidates or that were elected in federal, provincial or municipal elections. We know it, women are still underrepresented in politics. Their presence at the National Assembly has remained stagnant at 30% for the past 15 years. The obstacles that elected women face have been well documented through research. According to the Conseil du statut de la femme, the difference in how girls and boys are socialized, the unequal sharing of family responsibilities, and the culture of parties and political institutions are the main factors that hinder a fair presence of women in politics.

Based on the findings of the interviews conducted by the council, it was only after a rigorous assessment of their abilities and on the effect that political life would have on their personal lives and professional lives that the majority of the women interviewed chose to actively get involved in politics. We must admit that the current parliamentary organization was designed and implemented by men, at a time when they could avoid family tasks to fully dedicate themselves to public life. But this situation is no longer suited to a time where most fathers and mothers have a parental role as well as a professional role. Despite this common responsibility, work-life balance is a burden that affects women more particularly. In the world there are a number of support measures for parenting that can facilitate a balance between parliamentary work and parental work.

The council also believes that the masculine culture of political debate is based on a combative idea, one of jousting, which continues to discourage women who as a whole do not see themselves in this type of exchange. Given the stagnation in women's representation, we believe that binding measures need to be adopted so that here, in Quebec, we can reach parity for candidates, which would mean between 40% and 60% for both genders.

Through our research, we noted that very little work had been done on the profile of elected women. Without making any specific recommendations, the council hopes that political parties take diversity into account and that they facilitate the access of women from all social categories to the political sphere. We also believe that it is important to maintain the funding of projects that seek to support political action by women. Meeting inspiring people as well as participation in social and political activities are also determining factors.

The numbers that I will share with you may be surprising. We thought that it would be interesting to analyze the presence of young women during parliamentary simulations that took place in the National Assembly of Quebec in the past few years. Recently, in 2016, the student Parliament for grade 6 students included 65.6% of female participants. The youth Parliament for those in their third and fourth year of high school included 65.2% of female participants. The student Parliament at the college level included 43.6% of women participants and the one for young women between the ages of 18 and 25 included 31.9%.

Given these results, we are forced to conclude that even today, despite all of the work that is done, there is a clear decrease in women's interest and involvement in politics as they age. There is no easy and single solution that will resolve the complex issue of the underrepresentation of women in politics. Notwithstanding the measures that were discussed previously, we need to act upstream.

● (1655)

The Conseil du statut de la femme recently issued an opinion on gender equality in schools, which recommends a mandatory gender equality class be given in schools from the beginning of primary to the end of secondary schooling. One part of this course could in fact focus on the equal socialization of girls and boys with regard to politics.

We know that Quebec is one of the most advanced societies in the world when it comes to gender equality. Unfortunately, the lengthy stagnation of women's political representation indicates that goodwill is not enough. A thorough change of approach and concrete legislative measures are necessary to reach political parity, a principle which is at the heart of gender equality.

Thank you for your attention.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you, Louise.

Because we are on limited time, we're only going to be able to do the first round, so that would be seven minutes, seven minutes, seven minutes and then back for the last seven minutes. If you wish to ask extra, just make sure you coordinate on that among your groups.

We're going to start off with seven minutes to Emmanuella Lambropoulos.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos (Saint-Laurent, Lib.): Hello. Thank you for being here to answer our questions.

[*English*]

Thank you to everyone who is here to give us some insight for our study.

The first question I'm going to ask is for Natalie. You said you have about 10 years of experience working on campaigns for male and female candidates and you've noted the difference in questions that women and men are asked at doors when they are campaigning and in election mode.

You also mentioned that society isn't where it should be when it comes to gender stereotypes and sexism. I'll let you agree with me or not that this is still an issue and that if nobody does anything about it, as it stands, we're not going to get anywhere.

Do you agree?

● (1700)

Ms. Natalie Pon: On your first point, when I campaign with men and they're asked about their family situations, it's usually out of curiosity. When women are asked about their family situations, it seems to be a basis for measuring their competency.

I'm not sure what the solution to that is. A lot of it is generational, and as people closer to my age start to get more involved in politics, maybe things will change. Moving forward, we all need to be aware of it, and as volunteers on the ground we need to be calling out these things when we see them and encouraging our other volunteers to do so as well.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I am 27 years old. I was elected last April, and I can tell you that door-knocking is probably the most effective way to get elected, because you're meeting your electors and motivating them to go out and vote for you. I was asked by almost all of them how old I was. I was asked, "Aren't you too young to run? What's your experience? Are you a student?"

These are things that wasted the time in which I could have been selling my platform and talking about ideas that are important. Instead, I was just trying to justify being there at their door. I feel I was given less of a chance than a man running against me would have been given. Luckily, in my nomination, there were no men running against me. I think that helped.

You say that quotas are not a good option. What do you think could be done to increase the number of women we have running for office?

Ms. Natalie Pon: I really want to see fifty-fifty representation in politics. It is important, but I don't want to do it falsely. Whether quotas get us to a false fifty-fifty or not is irrelevant, but it opens us up to some scrutiny, which is unnecessary in the first place.

Women are already questioned about their place at the table in government and in the business world, and if we're also then mandating that we need to have 50% representation, it opens up that question, warranted or not, of whether they deserve to be there at the end of the day.

The biggest thing, from my perspective as someone who is involved on the ground, is that if you see a female candidate who you think is going to do a good job, you need to step up and help her. It's easy to say you're going to support someone, but until you're out there delivering memberships.... If you can deliver them 100 memberships, you've helped them. If you can help them to fundraise a couple of thousand dollars, you've actually quantifiably helped them.

As volunteers and party members, we need to start delivering measurable results to female candidates we think can do a good job, and that's going to be the best place to start.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: All right. Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Asselin, Ms. Gilbert, you spoke of municipalities. We know that a majority of female politicians work at the municipal level, probably because this is closer to the home and because it is the first step. You said that some mayors have trouble finding female candidates. Can you tell us why?

Personnally, I do not think there is a lack of willing candidates and that people do not want to enter politics. In Montreal, I know various women who took part in a nomination process in various federal ridings. I do not know what the situation is at the municipal level; however, I know that in Montreal, more than 50% of representatives are women.

Could you tell me why mayors are having trouble recruiting female candidates?

Ms. Sylvie Asselin: We need to start by talking about the disparities in our RCMs. We have RCMs and towns with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. On these town councils, the mentalities are often very masculine. Women don't feel like they have a place on these councils. When women do want to carve out a space, they are given files that are often managed by women.

When it comes to women's participation in politics, small municipalities have not yet made the same advances. Let us take as an example the region of Quebec City, which includes Quebec and L'Ancienne-Lorette. In Quebec City, there is a good level of representation by women.

On the other hand, we must recall that mayoral candidates also have a lot to do with this. Some mayors feel that recruiting women is very important. They take the time to meet with us and to meet with the Conseil du statut de la femme. They look for possible solutions, and that shows a real openness.

However, I would say that in Quebec, small municipalities and RCMs play a large role in representation. That is where we need to change a few points so that women can understand that they have a role to play.

We also need to help these women develop capacity. Over the last three years, things have gotten worse. One of our problems is that women who are elected end up becoming discouraged and get tired of constantly fighting the very masculine mentalities on the council. They decide to throw in the towel and go back home.

Thus, we need to help these women and provide them with a network. As was mentioned earlier, they often don't have the network, and we need to provide one for them.

In these municipalities, councillors receive a yearly income from $8,000 to $18,000, as was mentioned earlier. This is why the positions are often filled by retired women, but rarely by young women.

● (1705)

[*English*]

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you so much.

We're now going to Rachael Harder for seven minutes.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Thank you, Chair. I'm going to split my time with my partner in crime, Stephanie Kusie.

Thank you so much to all the witnesses for taking the time to be here with us today. We really appreciate it. Again, I'm so sorry about the votes throwing things off.

My first question is for Women for 50%. I'm wondering if you work with all parties. If so, I'm wondering how you ensure that you remain non-partisan so that anyone from any party feels welcomed and secure in coming forward for assistance.

Ms. Norma Dubé: We work with the four major political parties in the province of New Brunswick. All were invited to participate. We made it very clear from the beginning that the only way we would work with them was by having them sit side by side with us in a room with other political parties where we could work together, because we wanted to build some tools and some systemic changes together. The four major parties are absolutely at the table.

I think you earn that credibility of being non-partisan by your actions and probably by your reputation. New Brunswick is a small province. I was assistant deputy minister of women's equality for the province for a good number of years and worked with successive governments of different political ilks. I think that assisted us in getting off the ground, and then our actions spoke for themselves.

Without the political parties in place, we're just a group of 12 women with no funding except for a few gifts that we've received along the way. If we did not have the political parties at the table, we would not necessarily have.... As for the success that I think we've had in the conversations we've been having, I know we've earned that reputation, because I'm getting personal phone calls at home from women who have particular affiliations with all of those parties.

Ms. Rachael Harder: That's excellent. Thank you so much.

My next question is for Louise.

Louise, in your opening remarks you made a really great statement. You said that politics should "encompass diversity and make space for all". I'm wondering if you can clarify for this committee whether you truly believe there should be a diverse spectrum of opinions, values, and beliefs represented in this place, or if there are some that are just simply inappropriate to be here.

● (1710)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Louise Cordeau: For the Conseil du statut de la femme, on the matter of diversity, we are talking about diversity of social categories, diversity of sexual identities, diversity of backgrounds. We know that the women who run for political office come from an environment that supports it. If they have around them women who are in places of power, places of decision-making, places of influence, they will have easier access to different networks. There must be a variety of expertise and candidates coming from different social backgrounds.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachael Harder: Okay. Thank you.

Go ahead.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie (Calgary Midnapore, CPC): First of all, thank you for being here.

Natalie, I have two questions that I think are very relevant to our province.

Leaders say they would like more women to run and win in nominations. What do you think is the extent of their obligation in terms of doing that?

Ms. Natalie Pon: Just to clarify, is it the leader's responsibility—

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Correct.

Ms. Natalie Pon: —in seeking those candidates out?

I think there's a lot at the top that needs to be happening here. If the leader is actively seeking out qualified female candidates, that's a large first step in making it very clear that there is an expectation in this or that political party that women will be putting their names forward. Whether that means sitting down one on one with them and explaining the process to them or the support available to them or making those connections they need to make in order to be successful, I think that needs to be happening.

If you identify a woman candidate who may be unfamiliar with the process, then connecting her with a campaign manager or a team or explaining how the nomination process works is going to be a great first step in achieving that.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: My second question is a two-part question.

Do you think women really support other women in politics? That's the first part of it.

Second, coming here after being a diplomat for 15 years, I feel a lot of pressure to be mean and not diplomatic. I'm wondering if you see this as a common theme in your evaluation of women in their performance as politicians. Thank you.

Ms. Natalie Pon: That first one is a loaded question.

In my experience there aren't as many female organizers and volunteers as there are male organizers and volunteers. Maybe that's part of the answer to your first question. I have met a lot of wonderful, amazing, competent female volunteers and organizers in Alberta, as I'm sure you have as well, but they're in the minority. EDA boards are largely populated with men and volunteer teams are usually men, so I think that we'll need to see more women getting involved in the grassroots process and in volunteering and on campaigns before we see some measurable change. I'm not sure that it's women not supporting women intentionally; I think it's just that there aren't as many women in the process in the first place.

To your second point, I think that some of the biases that we hold would label a woman's behaviour as mean when a man wouldn't be called mean in the same circumstance.

I've been told on a number of occasions by other female politicians—and not maliciously—to watch the tone of my voice in order to be taken more seriously. They tell me that if I raise my voice at the end of a sentence, I'll sound like a valley girl, or that I need to ground my voice to be taken more seriously because when women get excited, they can get shrill.

I'm not sure we need to be meaner. I think it's just that there are some biases that we still need to overcome in terms of how we just are biologically different from men in how we act and speak. There needs to be more recognition of things like that.

The Chair: Excellent.

I'm so sorry, Stephanie.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I have 20 seconds. I am sure of it.

The Chair: You don't, actually.

We're going to now move on to Kennedy Stewart for seven minutes.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby South, NDP): Thanks very much, everybody, for coming today. This is actually my last day in Parliament, but this is an issue I'm very concerned about. I've written about it as an academic for years, and I have put forward private members' bills to change this situation. Bill C-237 was a private member's bill to provide incentives to get more women into Parliament.

Again, it has been a great pleasure to be here on the committee.

I have a couple of things. First, I see this as an issue of fundamental justice in Parliament. If it's not 50% women, then it's an injustice that has to be corrected. I don't see it as.... Often this is framed as supply and demand; that's how it's looked at. I've heard both sides of the very good stories and very good evidence here. I tend to look at it as a demand-side problem of women being kept out rather than failing to access elected office, so I look for demand-side solutions.

Also, what helps sometimes is looking at the raw numbers. If we look at Prince Edward Island, it has 27 seats in the legislature. This means that you need only 13 women from the entire province in order to have 50%. There are already six women in the legislature—five? Okay, so we need seven more women from the entire province of P.E.I. in order to get parity.

To me it doesn't seem to be a supply-side problem. I think that if you went across the province, you would find seven women who could easily.... You'd find many more than that, so why is it that we can't ever get parity in any of our legislatures? For me, it's always a problem of demand. It's the same in New Brunswick, with 49 seats, right?

● (1715)

Ms. Norma Dubé: We need 100 in order to have 50% candidates.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Why is that?

Ms. Norma Dubé: Do you mean why can't we find 100?

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Can you find them?

Ms. Norma Dubé: I could name you the 100 competent women in New Brunswick who could actually be on the ballot.

I agree that it's both a demand and a supply problem. In that context, there are barriers on both sides and obstacles on both sides.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Why is it supply? If in Prince Edward Island we need seven more women, why is there a supply problem? What we're saying here is that we can't find seven. What is your explanation for why we can't find seven women? Is it that women are in adequate supply, but there's something keeping them from accessing these seats?

I would say it's political parties, myself, but I'm wondering what your opinions are. I'd be happy to hear from anybody on that.

Ms. Norma Dubé: I can start.

Yes, political parties have a big role to play in terms of the solution and the commitment. Surely we can find 100 competent women in our province to be on the ballot—that's our line. What I've been hearing from the political parties in New Brunswick is that efforts are being made in this round, efforts I feel have never been made before, so there is a commitment by the political parties.

What I'm hearing, based on my own conversations and those of other members of Women for 50% with potential candidates, is that you have to go through the whole litany of challenges that I've raised and that these wonderful women beside me have raised. You have to ask them once, twice, and sometimes five times. You have to convince them that this is a good place for them. They've seen what politics is all about and they are not sure they want to get into that. Maybe they're too smart—sorry. I didn't say that. It's being taped.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Can I stop you there?

Ms. Norma Dubé: Yes.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: You're saying that you have to find 100 women to come forward, but really you're only 17 women short of having parity. Why is it 100? Why isn't it 20?

Ms. Norma Dubé: We're saying that we want 50% at least on the ballot so that our 16% has a chance of creeping up to something that will be a whole lot more appropriate. Our goal, our vision, is to make sure that we have at least 50% candidates by all parties.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Would anybody else care to jump in there?

Ms. Dawn Wilson: Yes, I'd like to jump in there.

Specifically, I think it's something New Brunswick and P.E.I. have looked at. I tend to agree. Island women are smart, they're qualified, they're capable, and I think they're ready to run for elected office, so I don't think that's....

We must acknowledge that there are internal barriers sometimes. We often hear women express a lack of confidence or a concern about qualifications. However, when we look at women's qualifications, they are often equally and sometimes more qualified than men for positions, so there is some work to do there.

The coalition tends to lean more towards structural and systemic change. We're working with political parties to address some of those barriers. We've identified that the nomination process is a barrier for women in P.E.I.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: What would you suggest we do?

Ms. Dawn Wilson: We often tell political parties to consider having 50% women and diverse people on their search committees as they're out recruiting women. We've talked about recruiting here as well. We tend to be friends with and have networks with those who are like us and look like us, so if you have an all-male search committee, it is more likely to come back with male names.

I also think it's important to recognize that P.E.I. is a small jurisdiction. I have a good friend who jokes that in Prince Edward Island people can tell your religious beliefs, your political affiliation, and your hockey team by your last name. It's a small area, and people think they know you before you're out there, so it's a bit a matter of overcoming that.

Also, I do think that we need to look at structural and systemic change. Parties have an important role to play there. In fact, parties can help buffer against some of the barriers that women face.

● (1720)

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: I see your reluctance here to say the word "quota". Quotas are used in over 100 countries. They seem to be some kind of a taboo word in Canada, for some reason. In British Columbia, the NDP uses a quota system. Why are we so scared to say the word "quota", if we know it's demand and we know it's systemic?

Ms. Dawn Wilson: I think there's a reluctance within the Canadian context to talk about quotas. The PEI Coalition for Women In Government does not have a position on quotas. However, we have worked on a project called "equity in governance" around increasing women's representation on boards. We know from the research in other countries that the quickest and most efficient way to reach that level is through quotas, though I will say that we don't have a position on them.

What we do have a position on is proportional representation. We have presented to the federal committee on that.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: We do have a quota here, in cabinet. The Prime Minister has said famously that 50% of his cabinet will be women, and that's a quota. If the highest political official in the land can believe in quotas, I don't understand why we can't move more there. I value your testimony here today, but I would urge you to take another look at that. If it's not changing, we have to do something differently.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Kennedy.

We're now going to move over to Eva Nassif for seven minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Eva Nassif (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all our participants for their presentations.

My questions are for Ms. Asselin and Ms. Gilbert.

As you know, I come from Laval. I am the first woman MP for the riding of Vimy.

In 2016, you received funds from Status of Women Canada, in collaboration with Groupe femmes, politique et démocratie, in which I had the opportunity to participate. In 2007, I received training which helped me a great deal in my political life.

You said that the goal of this project is to promote the emergence of a political culture that values the active participation of women throughout Quebec.

Could you simply talk to us about the results that have been achieved in the wake of this project?

Ms. Sylvie Asselin: The project you are talking about is Défi parité.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Yes, you received this funding in 2016.

Ms. Marjolaine Gilbert: In 2016, we received funds from the Secrétariat à la Condition féminine. We carried out the survey and did the interviews. With that, we uncovered the nine elements that can potentially determine the climate that prevails in municipal councils.

For the moment, we are indeed working on the Défi parité file, and the goal is to achieve a proportion of 40% to 60% of men and of women. In this case the funds are coming from Status of Women Canada.

Ms. Sylvie Asselin: The length of the project Défi parité, for which we received a subsidy from the Groupe femmes, politique et démocratie, is three years. Within the framework of this project, we are expected to implement an egalitarian governance policy among RCMs, for example. In fact, we are actually working on that. Certain municipal councils have already passed resolutions. We are going to develop the policy on equality and include governance and women at the municipal level.

Ms. Marjolaine Gilbert: We have a reeve who is a woman, and the RCM must first put forward a resolution. The reeves are hard enough to convince, even if we tell them that we're going to help them develop the resolution and that we are subsidized by Status of Women Canada.

Ms. Sylvie Asselin: There was mention earlier of equal qualifications. That subject comes up often. When it comes to current elected officials, if we set up a balanced council, women have to be given the opportunity to be part of it. Défi parité aims to integrate women into a man's world. Indeed, municipal councils are, for the most part, made up of elected men. This means that it is necessary to advocate for including women in communication and decision-making. It is a long-term undertaking.

● (1725)

Ms. Marjolaine Gilbert: As a matter of fact, mayors have told us that they have asked women to run for office, but that they do not want to go through the election process. We are there to change that kind of thinking and to convince them to run. We also want to talk to women. We have to find ways to encourage young people of 35 and under to run for office.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Exactly.

In practical terms, what do you do? Tools for women are lacking, and they are different from those provided to men.

What tools do you provide to women to convince them to get involved in politics?

Ms. Sylvie Asselin: The most effective tool is networking with women who have been elected, and peer experience. We do a lot of networking and activities where there are exchanges between women holding office and women who have been elected who come and share their experiences. They tell young women or older women that they do have their place in politics and that what they are going through is normal, and that is how things go, but that from now on, they must do things differently.

Our goal, by involving women who have been elected, is to encourage a sharing of knowledge and skills, as well as mentoring. This is done on an individual basis. Women who are elected give their time to mentor those who have been newly elected. On the eve of the 2017 election, we held training sessions to show women how a municipal election campaign is run. We talked to them about everything from knocking on doors to bingo cards, and so on.

We give them real tools based on their needs. However, after they are elected, they need to be accompanied to create a network with others. As we are part of an RCM, they are often alone in a council made up mostly of men. They have to find their social network. They have to talk about it. This is what we offer them, and it is important.

Subsidies are needed for our current programs. As was mentioned earlier, we do not have any funding. Therefore, we have to present projects to move things forward.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: Let me tell you about myself.

I have been actively involved in politics for over 10 years. I am a strong woman. I won two significant nominations, running against men and well-known people. I am strong. I decided to run for the third time in 2015, and I won.

In terms of recruiting women to run for nominations, what changes would you suggest to make this process more attractive for others? Personally, I didn't find it attractive, but I decided to go for it and to persevere. What would you suggest?

[*English*]

The Chair: You have about 20 seconds. Go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sylvie Asselin: Personally, I think that parties are very important at all levels. We lay the groundwork, but women need to know that they have a place within parties. Like you, women may run for a nomination, but if the nominations are made by the leaders, this is not an option. Sometimes, men are given priority over women. We need to give women the option of running for a nomination.

Society is ready to elect women. This year, in the riding of Louis-Hébert, Ms. Guilbault was elected in the provincial election with a big majority of the votes. She was young and pregnant.

This is a great accomplishment, and it's a sign that if we give people the choice of voting for a woman or a man, they will vote for the woman as often as for the man.

Mrs. Eva Nassif: There is no difference?

Ms. Sylvie Asselin: No, there is no difference.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

I'm sorry. Once again, this has been a very quick panel, but very informative.

I'd like to thank Roxanne Fairweather, who has left us, and Norma Dubé, from Women for 50%; Dawn Wilson, from PEI Coalition for Women in Government; and Sylvie Asselin and Marjolaine Gilbert.

Also, thank you very much, Natalie Pon and Louise Cordeau, for joining us.

Just as a reminder, because it was so quick, if you have any additional details, make sure you submit them to our clerk, and we will make sure they're handed out.

Thank you so much.

We'll be switching up our panels.

Members, since it's going to be a longer meeting, there is food at the back.

We're going to reconvene in about three minutes.

● _____ (Pause) _____

●

● (1735)

The Chair: Welcome back to the 110th meeting of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. We are now switching over to our next panellists.

We are going to be meeting with Susan Torosian, executive director for policy and public affairs with Elections Canada, as well as Jeff Merrett, who is the director of regulatory affairs and systems for Elections Canada.

From the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, we have Carole Saab, executive director, policy and public affairs, as well as Yolaine Kirlew, third vice-president and councillor, Municipality of Sioux Lookout.

Thank you very much. We're going to start with seven-minute opening comments, starting with seven minutes from Elections Canada.

Ms. Susan Torosian (Executive Director, Policy and Public Affairs, Elections Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the members for inviting Elections Canada here to speak with you today.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for having invited Elections Canada to participate in the committee's study on barriers facing women in politics.

[*English*]

Elections Canada is an independent, non-partisan agency that reports directly to Parliament. Its mandate is to be prepared to conduct federal elections, by-elections, and referendums, as well as conducting public information campaigns on voting and becoming a candidate and administering the political financing provisions of the Canada Elections Act.

Elections Canada's raison d'être is to ensure that Canadians can exercise their democratic right to vote and be a candidate as guaranteed in section 3 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Data shows that women vote at higher rates than do men, and our estimates indicate that in the last general election, 68% of women voted, versus 64% of men. A similar pattern occurred in 2011 and 2008 general elections, and this was the case across all age groups up to the age of 65, at which point men tended to vote at higher rates than women did. This trend was also observed in all provinces and territories, with the exception of P.E.I. and Yukon. As you can see, the under-representation of women is not at the voting booth but in the House of Commons.

In the last general election, less than a third, or 30%, of candidates were women, and 26% were elected as members of the House of Commons. However, we see a small upward trend in the proportion of female candidates, from 28% in both 2008 and 2011 to 30% in 2015. The proportion of women who were elected as MPs has also grown, from 22% in 2008 to 25% in 2011 and 26% in 2015. The proportion of female MPs in the House of Commons actually now stands at 27% following 13 by-elections since the last general elections. We just finished one last night, as a matter of fact.

This committee is well aware that the barriers to women's participation in politics are numerous and complex.

I personally had the opportunity to speak at a campaign school for women organized by the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women this past May. Over the course of that event, I had the opportunity to hear from a broad cross-section of women across society who have faced barriers similar to those we've seen in the research. These include the cost of the nomination process, a lack of political will, lower levels of self-confidence in the political field, the burden of caring for family members, and social barriers such as economic disparity, gendered stereotypes, discrimination, and harassment.

● (1740)

[*Translation*]

My presentation will be about barriers related to two aspects of Elections Canada's mandate: the administration of the political funding system under the Canada Elections Act, and the communication of information to the public about how to become a candidate.

[*English*]

The Canada Elections Act contains provisions that serve to level the financial playing field by imposing spending limits for nomination contestants, candidates, and parties. Spending limits create equal opportunity for all participants by limiting the amount of funding that is required to compete in a nomination contest or election. The act also regulates personal expenses incurred as the result of their candidacy. These include child care expenses and expenses relating to the provision of care for a person with a physical or mental incapacity.

Because these expenses are regulated, they must be paid for from funds that the candidate raises. If they are not reimbursed by the campaign, a candidate who pays for their own personal expenses is making what is known as a contribution. Candidates can contribute up to $5,000 to their own campaign. This limit and the requirement that personal expenses must be paid using campaign funds may place candidates with care-related expenses at an unfair disadvantage.

Recognizing that this can lead to unintended and undesirable consequences, the former Chief Electoral Officer recommended that Parliament remove the restriction that contribution limits on personal expenses have. Bill C-76 includes a provision that would permit candidates to use campaign funds or their own funds to pay these types of expenses.

The use of the candidates' own funds will no longer be subject to the candidates' contribution limit. As well, candidates who receive 10% of the vote would also be eligible for a 90% reimbursement of their care expenses, compared to the current 60%.

This small measure would assist women and all candidates who have child care and other care-related expenses and would put them on a more equal playing field or more equal footing as compared to other candidates.

Elections Canada has put significant effort into understanding barriers to voter participation, providing clear information products and improving our services to help people exercise their right to vote. We also offer a variety of information and training resources around the rules governing candidacy.

Our website includes general information on how to become a candidate, guidelines for candidates' representatives, training videos, and handbooks for contestants and candidates. We also offer annual in-person training sessions and online training for agents and others who support nomination contestants and candidates.

During elections, the returning officers in each riding hold an all-candidates meeting to provide the support and guidance candidates need. Our efforts are complemented with year-round support through the political financing support network.

I would now like to come back for a moment to the work we do on removing barriers to voting.

Each year we conduct sessions with various organizations representing target groups that, based on evidence, are more likely to face barriers. We also offer teaching resources and training for educators working with youth under the ages of 18 in schools across Canada. We will be launching a new suite of curriculum-linked educator resources this fall designed to build the interest, skills, and knowledge required to be active citizens.

In response to a rise in demand from civil society groups, we are considering producing information products and a discussion module that can be used at our Inspire Democracy stakeholder events across the country. Depending on the response, we could eventually integrate this type of programming into our educator resources for pre-voters as well.

In conclusion, the barriers that face women entering politics are neither simple nor straightforward. Addressing them will likely require a mix of solutions and undoubtedly require the involvement of various segments of society.

As the administrator of the Canada Elections Act, Elections Canada can play a small role in this important issue. I would appreciate hearing from members of the committee of any additional ideas you may have for us in terms of how we can contribute, and I would be pleased to assist the committee as you study this issue.

● (1745)

[*Translation*]

I will be pleased to answer committee members' questions or comments.

[*English*]

I would be happy to take any questions or comments that may have.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We really appreciate those comments.

We're now moving over to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities for seven minutes.

Ms. Carole Saab (Executive Director, Policy and Public Affairs, Federation of Canadian Municipalities): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and good afternoon, everyone.

My name is Carole Saab. I'm the executive director of policy and public affairs with the FCM. I'm joined here today by Councillor Yolaine Kirlew, who was just elected as our third vice-president two weeks ago, alongside our second consecutive female president, Vicki-May Hamm

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hamm is the mayor of Magog.

[*English*]

With an elected board executive that's now 60% female, FCM members are walking the talk, and we're starting to see more women in leadership positions across all orders of government. I say "starting", but obviously, as you've been hearing today, there is much more to do.

In municipal government, just 26% of elected leaders are women. Among mayors, it's only 18%. Canada's commitments under the 1990 UN Economic and Social Council resolution to adopt a 30% minimum proportion of women in leadership positions have not yet been fulfilled. According to the UN, if women make up fewer than 30% of a government's representatives, its policies cannot be trusted to address their needs.

Canada and our cities and communities simply cannot afford to lose the insights and expertise of one half of our population. That's why FCM has been pushing for change, targeting barriers to women's participation in municipal politics.

FCM maintains a network of over 50 regional champions across the country to promote women's engagement in municipal elections and to mentor candidates. We also operate programs aimed at increasing women's representation in local government.

Our current program, FCM's Diverse Voices for Change, a project undertaken with funding from the Government of Canada, provides tools to help municipalities engage with under-represented women for a more inclusive decision-making system. The municipalities of Edmonton, Halifax, London, Montreal, and Sioux Lookout, Ontario, are working with community organizations to implement strategies, recommendations, policies, and procedures to strengthen the voice of women from diverse communities. Before that, FCM's Head Start for Young Women program brought women municipal politicians together with groups of young women to identify and address barriers and serve as a mentorship program.

Now, as we look to the future, we're looking beyond pilot municipalities. We're looking beyond the 30% goal towards parity. We see a real opportunity here to build a nationwide partnership that includes our 19 provincial and territorial municipal associations and to build meaningful collaboration with women's organizations at the national, regional, and local levels. By working together to break down barriers, this multi-stakeholder partnership will level the playing field and provide a better opportunity for all Canadians to play a part in influencing policy.

Speaking of women in local government, we're sharing our time, so I'm going to pass it over to our newly elected third vice-president, Councillor Kirlew. Again, she is from Sioux Lookout and flew to be here with us today. This is one of her first opportunities in her new capacity, and I can't think of a more appropriate topic.

Over to you, Councillor Kirlew.

Ms. Yolaine Kirlew (Third Vice-President and Councillor, Municipality of Sioux Lookout, Federation of Canadian Municipalities): Thank you very much.

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

It truly is a pleasure to be here. Usually the legs of the journey are about three flights to get from Sioux Lookout to Ottawa. On those long trips I am always thinking about what it is that really needs to be stated and how it needs to be stated clearly to our Ottawa audience, so I am looking forward to this opportunity today.

As you know, this is my first opportunity to come before you. I must say that when I first considered running in Sioux Lookout, there were quite a few different pressures that certainly weighed on me. I will lay out for you the experiential component to what has been laid out by Carole.

The pushes came from different sources. They came from family. They came from a community that, being a rural northern environment, is typically not familiar with diversity to the extent that cities are. Being originally from the cities and then moving to the north—and I have been there for about 10 years plus—I find it really interesting to see the dynamics of how communities embrace diversity within the framework of decision-making.

I heard the voices that said, "Maybe you're too new to the environment. Maybe you need to take a little bit more time to get to know the community, even though you've been here for 10 years." I've also heard individuals say, "Perhaps you should wait this election out and wait for another cycle." Many, many pushes were there. Certainly, being one who does not back away from a challenge, I approached it with vigour and dynamism, to say that the role of democracy is to engage and to make sure opportunities are there for all voices to be at the table, so I pressed forward and I made sure I stood firm in deciding to run.

Most interestingly, one of the things I would call a catalyst, something that really cemented the decision for me, was a little Caucasian boy who I think was about seven. I went to a school program in the evening, and he coyly came up beside me and asked me, "Are you black?" and I said, "Pretty much. I think so. It's the colour I was born in. I stayed out in the sun a little bit too long." He said, "I've never seen a black person before. I don't know what to do with a black person. What do I do? How do I approach you?" I said, "I think you're doing a good job. You started by saying that this is not something you're used to, but the fact that you took that step to talk to me is encouraging me to make sure that I am visible and I am involved and I am engaging." That way, the next generation can see what it means to have leadership from diverse backgrounds and can build within their learning experience the idea that leadership comes from all facets of life from all types of people with all types of skill sets.

Therefore I thank the little boy—let's call him Johnny—for being my angel and making sure that I wouldn't back down amid all the other challenges that existed, that I was present, and that I'd made that choice to get involved.

Today, four years later, I'd say that I have had many, many opportunities to continue that journey. I know you have heard that I am now the third vice-president for FCM and in three years will have the grand opportunity to represent FCM. I'll be the very first racialized minority female, and I'm an immigrant who now lives in Canada and has called Canada home for about 29 years.

It's an interesting opportunity to engage this notion of diversity and see how we grapple with being different and how we make those differences a part of the process of building better and stronger communities with a unified voice regardless of differences.

We need—

● (1750)

The Chair: Actually, we're shortly over our seven minutes already. What we're going to do is start our line of questioning. I've seen your brief here and it's a little bit different, I know, but please, we can have conversations afterward, and if you wish to send us any additional comments, that would be great.

Ms. Yolaine Kirlew: Great.

The Chair: We're going to do our first round, and each will be seven minutes.

We're going to start off with Sean Fraser.

Mr. Sean Fraser (Central Nova, Lib.): Excellent. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here.

As just a small coincidence, my sister is the only person I've ever met who has lived in Sioux Lookout, so she was formerly a neighbour.

Starting with Elections Canada, when we had Stats Canada witnesses here—and I'm just jogging my memory a little bit—one of the things they discussed was the different kinds of data they have. To some degree, they have fairly disaggregated data when it comes to general elections. When it comes to nominations, they indicated that there is no record kept of the gender of people who actually seek nominations.

Can you confirm that's the case, and is there any barrier preventing you from collecting that data today?

Ms. Susan Torosian: We currently collect gender information as part of the process. When candidates make their application, they would consent to sharing the gender data, and we share that with the House of Commons.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Is that just for general elections or for the nomination process as well?

Ms. Susan Torosian: It's for general elections, not for the nomination.

Mr. Sean Fraser: For the nomination process, is there anything preventing you from looking behind the party curtains to get that data as well?

Ms. Susan Torosian: I'll defer to my colleague.

Mr. Jeff Merrett (Director, Regulatory Affairs and Systems, Elections Canada): After a nomination contest is held, the registered association that holds the contest files a nomination contest report with us that basically names all the contestants and indicates who won. On that form, there is no gender identification. We could do something in that area, but it would basically be just evaluating the names on those contest reports and assigning a gender based on the name, which wouldn't be perfect.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Literally, if there was a box added to this form, would this problem be solved, and we could have that data disaggregated by gender? Is there an obstacle preventing us from adding that box, asking male, female, or other?

● (1755)

Mr. Jeff Merrett: I guess there's just no program authority to collect the information. You get into privacy stuff when it's not prescribed in the law that we collect that information.

Mr. Sean Fraser: What kind of change in the law would be required? I think it's a great idea to get this information. Is there a legal change that we could find that would accomplish this?

Ms. Susan Torosian: Perhaps we could take that question, and come back to you—

Mr. Sean Fraser: I'd greatly appreciate that.

Ms. Susan Torosian: —because we're not quite sure whether there would be a legal.... I suspect there would have to be some kind of legislative change.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Well, I'd appreciate it if you could follow up with the clerk. That would be excellent.

Ms. Susan Torosian: Absolutely.

Mr. Sean Fraser: The second issue that you raised was about the kinds of everyday life expenses that are perhaps disproportionately borne by women who seek office. Child care is a perfect example. Some of the changes coming in are very positive and are going to make a big difference, but if you use campaign funds for the cost of child care, is that going to eat into your campaign expenses, or is it going to be treated as a separate pool of money that you're allowed to spend, even though you've raised it for campaign purposes?

Ms. Susan Torosian: If you personally fund those expenses, it will not contribute to your contribution limit, so there's an advantage there, but if you choose to pay for them out of the campaign funds, then it would eat into your—

Mr. Sean Fraser: Child care is expensive, and maybe you were living at home taking care of your children beforehand. If you use the campaign funds to do it, you would, in effect, be prevented from spending the campaign maximum on things like advertising and signs and that sort of thing. Is that right?

Ms. Susan Torosian: I'll let Jeff answer that.

Mr. Jeff Merrett: No, personal expenses are not subject to the election expenses limit. There's no ceiling on them. You can spend as much as you want in those areas.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Okay, but if you use your campaign funds for those personal expenses, would that contribute to your campaign expenses exceeding the maximum allowable expenditures?

Mr. Jeff Merrett: That's correct. Bill C-76 goes a bit further as well. If you do have those expenses, they're reimbursed at 90%, and there's a requirement that those funds have to go back to the candidate, so it's direct payment back to the candidate as well.

Mr. Sean Fraser: How much time do I have, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have another four minutes.

Mr. Sean Fraser: Oh, great. I feel like a millionaire right now.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: No, no, no; you're getting three.

Mr. Sean Fraser: That's great.

Shifting gears to FCM, we've heard a number of different witnesses describe municipal politics as a great stepping stone to different levels of politics. We've heard a lot of reasons anecdotally from some of our witnesses for choosing municipal politics, such as living close to home, having hours that aren't necessarily as demanding, and being able to have some predictability in the schedule. There's a whole host of reasons, but for the women who do use municipal politics as a springboard to a different level of government, does FCM track some of the people who have made that leap?

Ms. Carole Saab: That's a good question. We don't do any formal tracking by gender. We are very conscious of who in our provincial or federal counterparts has a municipal background. It would be interesting to look at that gender stat, so we'd be happy to do that in our work.

Mr. Sean Fraser: We're not necessarily empowered as a committee to tell FCM what to do—

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Sean Fraser: —but is there something we can tell the Government of Canada to do that would help identify women who have made the leap to provincial or federal politics so we can figure out whether it is anecdotal or whether it is empirically proven that women who served as municipal councillors are more likely to run to be a member of a legislative assembly or a member of Parliament?

Ms. Carole Saab: We'll take that question and get back to you. I'm not sure what the most efficient way of getting that answer is, but we'll identify it and happily get back to you.

Mr. Sean Fraser: That's great.

Coming back to Elections Canada, in terms of the ability to run public education campaigns post-Bill C-76, how could we best support Elections Canada's work to ensure that programming you're delivering is not just a general "Get out and vote" but also specifically encourages women to run, or perhaps, given some of the evidence in the last panel, encourages young women to get involved in politics from the beginning? What can we do as a government to ensure these social outcomes are being worked on, given the ability of Elections Canada to run education campaigns?

Ms. Susan Torosian: That's a great question.

We have spent quite a bit of energy removing barriers to the voting process. It's really been a question of capacity for Elections Canada in terms of where we could have the greatest impact as well, so really it's around capacity and perhaps investing a little more in this area. It is an area we believe we could integrate into some of our current programming, but it's a capacity issue.

● (1800)

Mr. Sean Fraser: My final question, if I have time, is for the representative from Sioux Lookout. Very quickly, we've heard a lot of evidence that sort of put the burden, in my opinion, on the individual woman or the individual person in the community to support the woman who is thinking about running, which is great, and when people take that initiative, as you have, and go with the vigour you've described, it is amazing, but from the government's perspective, I don't like the idea of just saying, "Women who are interested, go and run."

What can we do to have more people who are thinking about it actually take the plunge, as you have?

The Chair: You have time for a short answer.

Ms. Yolaine Kirlew: Great. Thank you very much. That's a great question.

It is about structurally making sure that there is an obvious process to which all women have access, beginning from the education perspective from as early as childhood to make sure education articulates that leadership is diverse and that women bring with them needed capacities to be integrated into leadership.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much.

We're now going to move over to Stephanie Kusie for her seven minutes.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Yolaine, I was very moved by your testimony. It is incredible what you've managed to achieve, and I want to provide you an opportunity to express any further ideas that you didn't have the opportunity to do previously.

Ms. Yolaine Kirlew: Sure. Thank you very much for that, Stephanie.

I really want to say that as women, we are not acculturated in this notion that running is for us and that running and winning are for us. It's something we need to do better, as a society and as governments, to make sure we articulate that and change the culture, the norm that politics is a male domain or that politics, being a public sphere, is only for a certain group. We really need to break that down, demystify it, and allow more conversation to be developed around it.

If we can encourage that piece, we'll see more individuals, diverse women from many backgrounds, more urban/rural candidates from different places taking on that role and stepping forward, as I have.

I want to see more Canadian women and girls believing they can. I personally do, and I know that for years that option never occurred, but it occurred once I had supports in my community saying "You're a leader. You're involved in so many ways. You inspire. I see the passion and the love you have for your community."

Oftentimes we talk about leaders being in many ways shifty politicians. I don't like that. There are lots of great people who are in roles of leadership who also acknowledge that they can collaborate and are capable of going across the board and bridging gaps. Those skill sets are fundamentally important in true leadership.

Making sure the awareness piece is out there is one way to break down that barrier for women initially, and then it's to create a wider conversation about engagement.

Clergy in my community were very supportive of giving me opportunities to develop my speaking capacity, so perhaps collaborating with different clubs and organizations to engage women is another way, and it's usually cost-effective. These organizations are engaged in their communities, and they reach out to a wider group of young people, whether through Scouts or through leadership training, making sure those are available as well.

Women and girls need to hear they inherently have real value as people, and that value can then be added into different contexts and different phases throughout their seasons of life.

I remember going into the municipal office. I had a four-month-old baby and two six-year-olds at home, and I said, "But we're doing it", and that was just it. I had a great partner who is a physician, but he understood the context of my capacity to add to my community, and he said, "I'm with you, babe", so thank you to my husband for being a real trouper. I know that in many other contexts women have partners who are supporting them too, so we have to give credit to the men and women who support their partners who are taking this leap.

Thank you very much.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you, Yolaine. I am very fortunate to have an incredible, supportive husband as well.

Ms. Torosian, Bill C-76 lays out party spending limits for future elections. Can you see ways that this potentially could harm women in their attempt to obtain office? I'm thinking that the party will have fewer resources to use in seeking female candidates and promoting these female candidates.

What's your opinion of this piece of legislation with regard to party spending limits?

● (1805)

Ms. Susan Torosian: Sorry; just for clarification on your question, is it in regard to party spending limits?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: That's correct.

Ms. Susan Torosian: Okay. I'm not sure if I have a point of view on that. I'm not quite clear on the question.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Sure. Going forward, political parties will have access to fewer resources in future elections than they have had previously. Is there any way you can see that this will be an impediment to their supporting women in election campaigns?

Ms. Susan Torosian: I don't really have a point of view on that. I'm sorry.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Okay. My second question is with regard to foreign funding.

Do you feel that women's ambitions for office are negatively affected as a result of foreign funding playing a part in federal elections? Do you think that foreign organizations could be a negative aspect in terms of being used to campaign against women or being used to defeat women? Do you see this legislation, Bill C-76, as a potentially negative aspect as well?

Ms. Susan Torosian: I think it's an interesting question that I have not thought about. It's an angle I haven't really honestly thought about. I know our CEO has spoken before the procedure and House affairs committee about Bill C-76 and foreign funding. I really wouldn't have any further comment, other than that.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Okay

Despite what we've heard about women being statistically less likely to say they're interested in politics, an analysis of voter turnout during the 2011 federal general election on your website notes that women participated at a higher rate than men.

Can you explain why women seem to vote more than men in elections, despite the fact that they're under-represented in other political activities?

Ms. Susan Torosian: Thank you for your question. I think it's an interesting question, and I actually asked the same question myself in preparing for coming to this committee.

We don't really have a thorough answer, but if you look at the Statistics Canada studies, you'll see that women tend to live longer than men, and in my speech I did mention that women generally vote at higher rates until they reach the age of 65. Then, between 65 and 75, they tend to be at parity, and then when they're 75 and older, they tend to vote at a lower rate.

The hypothesis would be that as we age, we face mobility disabilities and so forth, so there may be an issue in getting to the voting booth for women as they age, as they live longer. That's really the only explanation we have at this point.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you so much.

Now we're moving on to Kennedy Stewart for seven minutes.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Thanks very much. If you can indulge me for a second, the great political philosopher John Rawls uses the metaphor of a veil of ignorance and talks about how we should design our rules so that we actually don't know our own characteristics.

Unfortunately, the way we design our rules is that we do know our characteristics, and people design rules to favour themselves and people who are like themselves. We're in this situation with the Canada Elections Act. We're talking a lot about how if we have only 25% women in the House of Commons and we have only 25% women in local governments, it means there's something wrong with the rules, because there seems to be an equal aptitude to get into these races, and I think we have to embrace that.

I know this committee has been working on these problems for some time, and I do think it's not that women aren't willing to come forward but that the rules, especially within the political parties, are keeping them from achieving 50% or parity in candidacies, and eventually seats.

To Mr. Fraser's point, we don't really know what goes on in party nominations. They do in other countries. In the U.S., you have primaries and you have all the data you need there, but we don't know here. My own academic work has been to get data from parties, which they're very reluctant to give up, but then you find, for example, as we found in British Columbia, that men are six times more likely than women to win a nomination race.

That's what we need to do here. If we can't agree on quotas and we can't agree on other measures, at least we can agree on getting better data. Subsection 476.1(1) of the Canada Elections Act is about the notice of nomination contest. Each party has to report under paragraphs (a), (b), (c), and (d). Paragraph 476.1(1)(c) says you have to have the name and address of each nomination contestant, so you could simply have it ask for name, gender, and other aspects. I think it's entirely appropriate that we talk about intersectionality as well.

I think gender is a long-outstanding issue. Of course in Canada we brag about our multiculturalism, yet our offices are often devoid of any kind of multiculturalism, and it's mostly guys like me, right? That also should be data that's collected so we can deeply understand and explain to people what's going on within nomination contests.

That was a bit of a rant, but if all of you had some comments, that would be fantastic.

Thank you.

● (1810)

Ms. Susan Torosian: If I could speak for Elections Canada, certainly data makes for better decision-making and informs all of us, so if that were something that Parliament wished to change in the act, certainly Elections Canada would be happy to administer it.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Thanks.

Are there any other comments?

Ms. Yolaine Kirlew: Thank you for your question and your context. I know that FCM is keenly working towards grappling with the data component and making sure that in the next cycle we're intentional about what we're looking for and how we can then extrapolate from the experience of women and use that in a meaningful way.

When I think about what we've done thus far and how we're looking at diversity, we're intentional about making sure that we have the voices that are not at the table from a multiculturalism perspective. We just completed Diverse Voices for Change, which is an initiative to get indigenous, racialized, and immigrant women, who are about 2% of the elected population right now, more engaged at the local level. It's also to make sure they have tools and to make sure that in their communities they're aware that the system structure of politics at the municipal level wants to engage with them, wants to know what the barriers are, wants to know how enabling through tool kits strengthens their capacity to step forward and put themselves out there, so to speak.

We've just gone through two or three years of that iteration, so in the next election this fall we'll be able to see how effective this process was and gather data to see if this is working. and if it's not working, whether we need to tweak an entire system or just components of what we currently have.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: The tricky thing about collecting data is that we collect lots on winners but we don't collect anything on losers, people who go into the contest and don't win, so then you can't compare the two groups, and that's just basic stats. You need it on both sides, and the more data you could have....

For example, in the studies I've seen, we've looked at 45 different variables. We've looked at networks and we've looked at how many people you sign up and all that kind of stuff, and we find that actually it just comes down to gender. There's a lot of bias within the selection groups, and it's everywhere.

I always think of Elections Canada as one of the best organizations in the world in the elections context. Countries everywhere come to Elections Canada to look at what we do and how we do it, and I think it would provide a great international gesture to say we're pushing others to do this.

Are there any other things you can think of that would help your job and help us to understand how nominations work in Canada?

Ms. Susan Torosian: I was going to add something, but not so much around the nominations. I did hear this when I attended the campaign school. Granted, this is one school that I've attended. I've not done a lot of these events, but one of the things I did hear was that there was a lot of confusion around the rules and running a campaign. It's very complicated.

One role that's quite important for any candidate is that of the official agent. The official agents are volunteers. It's an unforgiving job. There were some recommendations made by the former CEO to actually provide compensation for official agents, and this would go a long way in supporting candidates, particularly new candidates, women candidates, diverse candidates, people new to the process, because it is a complicated web. It's great to have somebody who's on your team who knows what they're doing and is trained and accredited in that field. I think that could go a long way to levelling the playing field for many candidates.

● (1815)

The Chair: You have 30 more seconds.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: I'll be very quick.

I know Elections British Columbia now collects information on municipal elections. Maybe you could ask other provincial bodies that collect information on local government elections to actually also collect this kind of information. Then we'd all be able to see what happens everywhere else in Canada.

I know I'm reversing roles here and I'm sorry about that, but I do think the more data the better. It'll help us make informed decisions.

Thank you very much for your testimony.

The Chair: Excellent.

We're now going to move over to Bernadette Jordan for seven minutes.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan (South Shore—St. Margarets, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Before I get to our witnesses, I would just like to thank Kennedy Stewart from this side of the table. We don't necessarily always agree on things, but to me, anyone who puts their name forward deserves our thanks, and I know this is his last day today. Thank you for representing your community. We really appreciate it.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Now I'm going to go to our witnesses.

First, to our two representatives from FCM, do you have the percentage of women who are elected municipally in the country? Not just mayors, but...?

Ms. Yolaine Kirlew: Right now it's at 26% in terms of 2015, I would say, in the data collection that we have. Then 16% are mayors and 28% are councillors. Further to that—

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: It's interesting, because that is pretty much the same as what we have in the House of Commons, yet yet when StatsCan was here a few weeks ago, they said more women are likely to run and be elected municipally than they are provincially or federally. That's obviously not the case, which blows my whole line of questioning, to be honest, because, of course, we want to see more women run at all levels of government.

I'll go to the FCM and maybe they can comment on one thing I also find quite interesting.

When I was running for the first time, one of the things I heard continually was the idea that I should start at the municipal level and then run for something else. I'm sure my male counterparts probably didn't hear that, but for some reason it was considered a training ground for women. The thing was, that's not where my interest was. I have so much respect for municipal politicians because it's a very different world, but it's not my interest level.

I don't know if you want to comment on those kinds of comments that I got as a woman.

Mr. Serré, Mr. Fraser, did you guys get those? No.

I'm wondering if you have any comments to make on that aspect.

Ms. Yolaine Kirlew: Great. Thank you.

Similar to what you're saying, my interest was always in federal politics as a life goal. As a child, I wanted to be a politician, but moving from the city to the rural context, it was very difficult to participate. To me, the order of government closest to the people to effect change right away was the municipal realm. At the stage and season of life that I was in, with young kids, it made more sense for me to be a part of that and understand how that works and how that connects to federal politics.

That curiosity has been dynamic. In all my learning of politics in university, we never focused on the municipal level at all. I'm glad that I did start off in municipal offices. Now I have access through FCM to the broader national scope of how we all connect and intersect as an order of government and grapple with national challenges and find local solutions to them.

I would say don't knock it until you've tried it. It really is a dynamic place to be accountable to the people and to make sure that you're honing your sense of connection and your willingness to put yourself out there and defend and stand up for positive cause and social change.

If that's what can break that barrier and break the ice, I would say let's be honest and encourage it. If it can be a great place to develop talent, let's not slight it; let's embrace it—

● (1820)

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Please, I was not slighting it in any way, shape, or form. I have nothing but the greatest respect for municipal politicians, because I believe they get a lot more flack on more grassroots things than we do. I totally have nothing but the greatest respect for anybody, actually, who runs for political office at any level.

To your point, you made a comment about being interested in federal politics, but because of where you lived.... Do you see living in a rural area as a barrier to being involved in politics?

Ms. Yolaine Kirlew: I've seen it as an opportunity, actually. Again, it's just my perspective and my world view that you can take what is in front of you and make it as dynamic as you are inclined to.

In co-operating with my family and in co-operating with my community, I looked at it from the perspective of how the municipal political landscape translates into the federal conversation and vice versa, and FCM has been the only voice, I would say, that is nationally connecting the municipal lens with federal issues and finding solutions to what across Canada many communities face, rural and urban, by finding common ground and coming up with solutions that can echo the sentiment of change and make our country a better place to live.

Mrs. Bernadette Jordan: Two of the areas that I represent now are the only areas in the country where the mayor of the municipality, the mayor of the town, the MLA, and the MP are all women. We have two, and we're the only two in the country, to the best of my knowledge. We've asked why it is that this little area in rural Nova Scotia is able to attract women to seek these offices.

I'd like your comments on that kind of dynamic as well, because it is a very different thing to see all of the leaders and politicians in the area being women. Actually, the mayor of one of the towns is a female mayor, and she's the only woman on council, and I am the only woman elected in Nova Scotia federally, so it's a really odd dynamic.

Ms. Carole Saab: Congratulations. That's fantastic. Kudos on that.

You've heard a lot about it and we could talk a lot about it, and we'd be happy to send more information about the scope of the systemic barriers to women engaging in politics at all orders of government across the board.

In terms of one hypothesis for the question you're asking around why that's the case, we've identified some pretty significant areas where we can do some tangible work to blow through these kinds of barriers to women, but it requires resources, it requires mentorship, it requires effective networking, it requires effective programming, and it requires partnerships to deliver those in a comprehensive way.

As an organization, we've targeted our efforts in that regard, and it has proven successful at a small scale. We're trying to scale up and continue that work. I don't know your community very well, but I suspect you have a lot of the ingredients at play that have contributed to what is a highly impressive lineup of women.

The Chair: Excellent. Thank you very much.

Rachel Harder has given her time to Blake Richards. Blake, you have four minutes.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a comment and a couple of questions.

First of all, the comment I want to make is for you, Ms. Jordan. You mentioned that you had sort of been pushed when you talked about running federally compared to municipally. I'm not certain if that is a male/female thing, because it was something that I heard as well when I thought about running.

I personally took it as there being a lot of people who get into politics now and maybe see it as a career. They start with the municipal level as a springboard and then move to other things in building name recognition. I would argue that maybe that's not necessarily the right reason for going in politics.

My comment back to people at the time was, "No, actually, I'm getting into politics because I care about certain issues, and they happen to be federal issues." I don't know; maybe it was the same in your case, or maybe it wasn't. I don't know, but I would point out that it happened in my case as well.

I'll start with questions for Elections Canada.

You mentioned some of the rates of voting in your opening remarks. You mentioned the rates of elected candidates. You made the comment that you didn't feel that it was in voting that more that could be done, but that maybe it could be in terms of the elected officials. You did mention, of course, that it was going in the right direction and that we were seeing improvements and increases there.

I noticed in this provincial election in Ontario that occurred about two weeks ago and brought in the Doug Ford government that almost 40% of those elected to that legislature are females, which I think is the highest percentage in the country. Obviously it's another example of moving in the right direction, which is great to see.

The question I want to ask has a couple of parts to it. Given that we're seeing those improvement rates and given that you mentioned in response to Mr. Stewart that some of the data may not be as good as it could be, do we have any sense as to...? We know what proportion of parliaments or legislatures are made up of women; that's easy to figure out. Are you aware of anything that tracks the success rate of female candidates compared to the success rate of male candidates? In other words, are women being elected in greater proportion when they do put their names forward, or are men being elected at greater proportions? That might give us some sense of any biases that exist elsewhere.

Do you have any thoughts or data that you can share with us? As well, I don't know if the Federation of Canadian Municipalities has any information. If either one of you has information, I'd love to hear it.

● (1825)

Ms. Susan Torosian: I'm sorry; I think it's a great question, but unfortunately it's not something that we have looked at.

As you know, nomination contests are run predominantly by the parties. We have a very minor role—

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm not talking about nomination races. I'm talking about when people—

Ms. Susan Torosian: When they are running as an official candidate...?

Mr. Blake Richards: —are chosen as candidates by their parties. Is there a different success rate for women in a general election, as compared to men?

Ms. Susan Torosian: We haven't done any analysis on that.

Mr. Blake Richards: Would the FCM have any information on that?

Ms. Carole Saab: At a municipal level, in 2015 we worked very hard to try to solicit that kind of information in local government. To add to the challenge in terms of my questions here around data as a barrier, part of our challenge in doing this is that the data is collected very unevenly by provinces across the country, and in really problematic ways, in terms of getting any sense of comparables from a national perspective.

As you engage that issue federally, certainly our perspective locally would be that ensuring this is harmonized across the country in a way that enables comparables would be critical to the equation.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. It sounds like something that would be a valuable thing.

Ms. Carole Saab: Absolutely.

Mr. Blake Richards: Madam Chair, is there any more time?

The Chair: You're shut down. You're done.

Mr. Blake Richards: You don't give us a long enough time in this committee.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I apologize, Blake. Maybe you can come back and we'll try it again. Then you'll have eight minutes: four from today and four next time.

For the final four minutes, Emmanuella Lambropoulos, you have the floor.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Thanks for being with us today.

My main questions are for Elections Canada. They are along the lines of what Sean was asking about earlier.

Do you have any contact at all with the EDAs of each riding?

Ms. Susan Torosian: I think Jeff could best answer that.

Mr. Jeff Merrett: We deal with electoral district associations all the time. We do annual training sessions across Canada. They all have annual filing requirements with us, so we're in regular contact with them, mostly with their financial agents.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Okay.

When a nomination is happening, most candidates are asked to go through the EDA president when they have an interest in running. That's not necessarily all of the people who actually run, but the ones who have an interest in running will go through the EDA presidents and let them know about their interest before they go on. Would you be able to get that information from these presidents? What would be the process in order for you to gather that information? I'm not talking about the ones who run for nomination, but about the ones who even express an interest at first.

Mr. Jeff Merrett: I can only talk to what the requirements are in the Elections Act today, and there is no requirement for EDAs to disclose that type of information to us. That would require a legislative change for additional reporting on nomination contests. Currently they only disclose the names of the people who enter the contest.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Do you have the numbers? I heard them recently, but I think you might have said different numbers. Can you clarify again how many women ran for nominations, and how many women won the nominations?

● (1830)

Mr. Jeff Merrett: We don't have gender information on nomination contests, just for candidates.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: Even though you have names, you haven't necessarily done that—

Mr. Jeff Merrett: The gender isn't identified on the form. It could be done roughly, but it wouldn't be a perfect science. We'd have to make a gender assignment based on the names, so it would probably give a ballpark, but it wouldn't be precise.

Ms. Emmanuella Lambropoulos: I know Marc hasn't asked any questions, so would you like some time?

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Okay. I'll ask along the same lines. I wonder if you have any specific recommendations, because we've heard a lot that the nomination is a party responsibility and that there are a lot of barriers there. Have you made any recommendations? Do you have any studies, any link to how we could improve the transparency of nominations?

Ms. Susan Torosian: That's a great question. Numerous recommendations and studies have been made in the past, going as far back as the Lortie commission in 1991, which made a number of recommendations around the nomination contest. Many of these recommendations are not in play today. Several of them look as if they would be very relevant, based on the conversations of some of the other witnesses I've heard speak before this committee.

Quite a bit of work has been done in this area already. I know that's dated material, but there are other studies as well, going back to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. Most recently, a recommendation was made to amend the CEA, the Canada Elections Act, to create financial incentives for political parties to run more women.

I know there are diverse views on quotas and so forth; there are those who are for it and those who are against it. Ultimately, these are decisions for Parliament to make, but there is some literature and documentation around it.

Mr. Marc Serré: Madam Chair, can we have those two documents sent to the clerk for the study?

The Chair: Yes, if you could forward those documents to our clerk, it would be very helpful.

We have finalized our last panel for today. Once again I'd like to thank Carole Saab and Yolaine Kirlew from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and Susan Torosian and Jeff Merrett from Elections Canada.

We are going to suspend for 30 seconds, if you don't mind. I'm going to ask everyone to leave who is not a member of the committee or the one staff person permitted per committee member.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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